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**Importation of Live Crustaceans into Australia risking the release of White Spot Syndrome Virus and Crayfish Plague.**

**Executive Summary**

All freshwater crayfish were banned from live import to Australia in the early 1950's as a response to the worldwide outbreak of Crayfish Plague *Aphanomyces astaci*. This ban was further enforced with the EPBC Act 1999 which prohibits the importation of live exotic crayfish into Australia. Exotic crayfish can carry White Spot Syndrome Virus (WSSV) as well as other exotic diseases.

In early 2016 the trade in exotic crayfish started within the Australian Aquarium trade. This trade started as a clandestine trade on Facebook with requests to delete trails; everyone involved new they were doing something wrong. Complaint was made to the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources (DAWR) on the 12<sup>th</sup> July 2016. They investigated, disease tested one animal and concluded the crayfish being sold were disease free, were offspring bred in Australia and outside their jurisdiction as they were not directly imported parent broodstock crayfish. The Minister, Barnaby Joyce MP states: *"As a result, my department is unable to do anything under the Biosecurity Act 2015 as it applies to goods (which includes animals) that have been imported into Australia and does not apply to the progeny of a species in established populations"*. They gave the approval to the breeder/seller to continue trading and the trade moved from clandestine into mainstream media. The exotic species is now openly traded on Gumtree with the sellers touting their crayfish have been disease tested and they have the approval for sale in Australia from the DAWR.

The Department of Agriculture and Water Resources further increased the risk to Australia by failing to pass along the results of their investigation the Department of Environment and Energy who enforces the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. This inability of one Government Department charged with the protection of Australia to communicate with another Department charged with the protection of Australia presents a huge unacceptable biosecurity risk to Australia.

The Department of Environment and Energy (DEE) was contacted next as it is their jurisdiction to enforce the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999. The EPBC Act 1999 prohibits the sale of offspring from illegally imported species. It is impossible to distinguish between an offspring of an illegally imported species or a newly illegally imported species. With some of the other exotic species being valued at \$500-\$2000

each it is increasing probable that more will be illegally imported. Currently the DEE is investigating, whilst the lucrative illegal trade continues.

This illegal trade has been continuing for 9 months now placing Australia at increasing risk every day. The complete failure of the Australian Government to react to this biosecurity emergency issue places Australia's primary industry, trade and ecology at greater risk daily.

### **Submission on Behalf Of:**

This submission under paragraphs (a, b, c, d & i) of the terms of reference of the enquiry, is presented on behalf of the NSW Aquaculture Association Inc. and the Australian Crayfish Project.

The NSW Aquaculture Association Inc. (NSWAA) makes this submission on behalf of the Australian Crayfish Industry which is at risk of annihilation from exotic diseases transmitted by exotic crayfish. [www.nswaqua.com.au](http://www.nswaqua.com.au)

The Australian Crayfish Project (ACP) makes this submission on behalf of the ecology of Australia. The ACP is concerned over the conservation of all our native crayfish species that are all at risk from exotic disease from illegally imported exotic species and the danger these species represent when released into Australian waters. [www.austcray.com.au](http://www.austcray.com.au)

### **Our Submission**

The biosecurity risks associated with the importation of seafood and seafood products (Live Crayfish) into Australia, with specific reference to:

- a. *Management of the emergency response and associated measures implemented to control the outbreak of White Spot Syndrome Virus;*

Exotic freshwater crayfish are known carriers of White Spot Syndrome Virus and other exotic diseases like Crayfish Plague that Australia is free of. Exotic freshwater crayfish are now in Australia and being openly traded.

The failure of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to stop the illegal importation of these exotic species is a major biosecurity risk to Australia.

The inability of the Australian Government to respond to this emergency biosecurity threat is unacceptable. To allow exotic illegal species to be openly traded in Australia in defiance of Australian law for over 9 months now whilst various Government departments investigate is totally unacceptable.

- b. *The effectiveness of biosecurity controls imposed on the importation of seafood and seafood products, including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and prawn meat into Australia, including the import risk analysis process concluded in 2009 that led to these conditions being established;*

The current biosecurity controls on the importation of live seafood or live freshwater crayfish are a complete failure as evidenced by the sale of illegal species in Australia

- c. *The adequacy of Commonwealth resourcing of biosecurity measures including Import Risk Assessments;*

The risk assessments are adequate for live imported crayfish, everyone knows the risk, the problem is lack of enforcement and lack of coordination and cooperation between Government Departments

- d. *The effectiveness of post-entry surveillance measures and "end use" import conditions for seafood products including, but not limited to, uncooked prawns and uncooked prawn meat into Australia, since the import conditions implemented in 2010 were put into place;*

Zero post-entry surveillance. Government did not detect the problem with illegal crayfish being traded, members of the general public did.

- i. *Any related matters.*

The biosecurity risks associated with the illegal importation of exotic potentially infected crayfish is further increased by the lack of coordination and cooperation between Government Departments. When the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources decided there was nothing they were prepared to do. They did not pass the information on to the Department of Environment and Energy who has jurisdiction over offspring of illegally imported species. Instead they were complicit in the crime allowing the illegal trade in illegal species to continue unabated and failed to report the crime to the appropriate authority.

The Minister states: *"You may also wish to raise this matter with the Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP, Minister for the Environment and Energy, who is responsible for the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999"*.

The reluctance of one Federal Government Department tasked with the biosecurity protection of Australia not to communicate or pass along intelligence to another Federal Government Department tasked with the biosecurity protection of Australia needs immediate investigation and remedy.

This lack of cooperation and coordination between and among federal departments places Australia at extreme risk.

Please expand your senate enquiry to include the above matters. Imported uncooked prawn and prawn meat is not the only vector for the spread and introduction of White Spot and other exotic diseases into Australia, live freshwater crayfish are also a major threat.

